EMAIL EXCHANGE WITH STEPHEN HEDER REGARDING DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA DEATH TOLL

Re: Fw: Re: Your refugee survey 1980-81
Friday, September 2, 2011 6:31 AM
From: "Steve Heder"
To: "Joseph Ball"

Hmm. One way of addressing this issue might be to compare the 1970-75 numbers with those of 1975-79, which I recollect should be possible from the data. I vaguely recall an arithmetic producing a soundbite (never disseminated) that the CPK regime was six times as fatal as the Khmer Republic (US bombing included?), but this is another instance in which I would need to review the original data, for what it is worth.

On 2 September 2011 01:26, Joseph Ball wrote:
Dear Mr Heder

Thank you for your reply. I accept you have told me all you can without going back over your evidence. I think Kiernan must have made an error in analysing your survey data. My own feeling is that excess deaths in Democratic Kampuchea did not total 20-25% of the population. I think that the death rate may have increased by something over 100% in the DK period which would in no way give excess deaths of 20-25% of the population. Probably more like about 10%, which is, I think, what your survey may indicate. None of the surveys cited by the ECCC sound very reliable and they messed things up with yours it seems. I must add I have no expertese in this subject but this is the hypothesis that seems most likely to me at the moment, given my limited knowledge. A death toll of 10% of the population is bad enough-there is no need to exaggerate things.

Joseph

Re: Fw: Re: Your refugee survey 1980-81
Thursday, September 1, 2011 7:06 PM
From:
"Steve Heder"
To: "Joseph Ball"

There is nothing in publishable form. I have the raw questionaires, or at least I think I do, with the quantitative data on one side the the paper and the qualitative data on the other, in many but not all instances linked a more detailed qualitative interview. The quantitative data was made availble in the mid-1980s to the then Cambodia Documentation Commission, which had some funding to code and analyze it statistically/demographically, but the funding ran out before the project was completed, and I packed the stuff away, where it remained while I did a series of demanding full-time jobs. The original calculations were done before that, in long-hand on yellow legal pads with the help of Thai friends (from the Youth League of the Communist Party of Thailand, as it happens) who were very interested in the results. A simple summary was circulated to various interested people, and I presume that was what Kiernan worked from. That's

a bit hazy because I cut off all relations with him decades ago. The investigating judges were not interested in the original files, in part because with the exception of some taped interviews I had done, they generally took the position that because I was in their employ, it was inappropriate for material originating with me to be put onto the the casefile. So the experts just used what Kiernan published. As I said, I hope to return to the raw questionaires/interviews in the foreseeable future. In any case, I'm not sure there's a Chinese wall between quantitative and qualitative here, or that one is intrinsically more valuable than the other. Aren't interviews asking about numbers as fundamentally qualitative as interviews asking for other details that attempt to look for patterns? Just because a calculator was used doesn't make the number material more indicative of what happened. I agree the figures are of some importance and it would be useful to have at least seemingly compelling orders of magnitude, although the jurisprudence on rough quantification of such concepts as "widespread" and "in part" is very complex.

On 1 September 2011 19:34, Joseph Ball wrote:
Dear Mr Heder

The fact is your survey is important. A lot of the evidence cited for Khmer Rouge death tolls is pretty useless in comparison. Extrapolating between censuses, that were very far apart to try and get a death toll for a four year period some time in between is pointless. It might look scientific but the method is rubbish unless you have reliable birth/death registration figures for the period in question and these don't exist.

The Killing Field count evidence that I have seen seems to be lacking in forensic backing. The CPK ended traditional means of disposing of the dead and the evidence I've looked at doesn't tell me whether people in mass graves were executed or died of natural causes. Qualitative evidence is not much good as it only tells us what happened to a specific group of people. Everyone agrees the CPK carried out mass executions, it's the numbers that are in question. In short your critique of my approach would be valid if I was arguing that the CPK ran Kampuchea like Sweden but as I am not it is invalid.

So I get back to the essential point, surveys like yours are important. The ECCC experts report cites your survey, did they actually see it or did they just read it second-hand?

Actually establishing the truth about the Democratic Kampuchea period is important. It's no good saying that we all know the CPK killed people so who cares about the figures? All governments kill people so the numbers are important. It is impossible to come up with a proper assessment of what went wrong in Democratic Kampuchea without some idea of the numbers that died-evidence that your survey, if published in full could provide. It doesn't matter whether you are a demographer or not. If you actually presented your data, there would be plenty of people out there who could come up with a proper death toll estimate from it.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Ball

Re: Your refugee survey 1980-81
Thursday, September 1, 2011 5:15 AM
From: "Steve Heder"
To: "Joseph Ball"

The dates should be April 1975- January 1979. Then, bearing in mind that my memory may be faulty, that neither Kiernan, nor you nor I are demographers, the point about subtracting natural mortality may be of some significance with regard to one piece of data among many others, all of which need to be considered. In that regard, I think it is a bit odd that you focus on this one piece of data, precisely because there is so much more to consider, including proper demographic studies (ie, Heuveline) and surveys (eg, the experts' report commissioned by the ECCC investigating judges), plus of course all the qualitative data from narrative interviews, which I did in connection with the survey and of which there are also now many thousands of others. Viewed in that context, the inference you attempt to make from the survey are totally unsustainable, even if all pieces have evidence should be subjected to questioning and contestation. What you have pointed out may tell us something about the survey, or my memory of the survey or your and others' inferences from it, but much less about what really happened. In other words, it may tell us that the survey is flawed, or my memory is mistaken, or my or your or others' inferences from it are erroneous, but does not provide a definitive basis for the kinds of conclusions you reach below, which are contradicted by a mass of other data. Or to put it more metaphorically, even if there is something wrong with this survey as a tree, it does not mean that, given all the other evidence of trees, there was no forest.

On 31 August 2011 23:33, Joseph Ball wrote:
Dear Mr Heder
Thank you for your very informative reply to my queries.

You state that 'normal' mortality has to be deducted from the figures that your survey gives. This is a very important point as Kiernan in his very widely read book 'The Pol Pot Regime' does not do this when he analyses your survey figures. He comes up with a figure of 20% of the population killed by the CPK regime, wheras your figures really imply a figure of just over 10% if 'normal' mortality is subtracted.

I am assuming that the survey figures in question are for April 1975-December 1979. I am also assuming they do not include deaths caused by the Vietnamese invasion-OK, the CPK started the war but it is a bit of a 'stretch' to say killings as a result of a Vietnamese invasion are the result of a CPK genocide.

An important point is how many of these deaths were due to executions. Kiernan suggests on p.456-7 of 'The Pol Pot Regime' (although he's a bit vague) that half the urban new people who died were executed, or about 400000. He then says your survey indicates that half of all the base people who died were also executed-so 400000 base people were executed. If we subtract normal mortality from your survey figures, then this would mean virtually all those who died due to the CPK were executed, the rest would have died anyway (assuming zero executions under the Lon Nol regime). Possible I suppose, but is that your conclusion?

Yes, I am the Joseph Ball who corresponded with Frank Dikotter. I would be interested in comparing Democratic Kampuchea with Maoist China in an article but anything beyond a short 'opinion piece' would be a long way in the future.

Anyway, I think your survey is very important in our assessment of this period. I would urge you to dig it out of storage and put it and all supporting materials (i.e. the data you gathered at the time) on the internet. It doesn't matter if it's in Khmer, plenty of people can read Khmer.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Ball

On 30 August 2011 22:53, Joseph Ball wrote:
Dear Mr Heder

As you are no longer an officer of the ECCC I was wondering if you could now answer my previous email (below) about your refugee survey carried out on the Thai-Cambodian border in 1980-81 please.

Yours sincerely

Joseph Ball

-----Original Message-----
From: Steve Heder
To: josephball924
Sent: Tue, 2 Feb 2010 2:20
Subject: Re: Your refugee survey 1980-81

As I am an officer of the ECCC, I am unable to comment on evidence and its interpretation.

On 1 February 2010 23:37, wrote:
Dear Mr Heder

Thank you very much for your reply. I was wondering if you could answer a few questions about the refugee survey in question, as it is rather an important source of evidence.

1. Ben Kiernan (page 456 of 'The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia Under The Khmer Rouge, 1975-79)' gives his own break-down of your figures to find that 33% of urban new people, including 25% of Khmer new people and 15% of rural base people died in the Democratic Kampuchea era. Do you agree with these figures?

[Dr Heder's reply] This sounds right, if memory serves (bearing in mind you are asking about work I did 30 years ago and which I have not reviewed since, although as it happens I may soon do that). NB: Not sure the label "refugee" applies fully to the interviewees, nor that the information can be deemed "refugee data," except perhaps a broad, catch-all sense. Some interviewees (e.g., those in the UNHCR-assisted Khao I Dang center) were seeking resettlement in "third countries" and could therefore be considered asylum seekers (i.e., "refugees"). Others, however, were only temporarily in border areas and intending to return to PRK Cambodia (which many did) including from areas under the effective control of anti-CPK, anti-PRK forces and from political no-man's lands where people had gathered to trade before going back into PRK zones. Still others were in UNHCR-assisted centres or border areas under effective CPK control, to which some had came voluntarily but into which many had been herded against their will. This mix of interviewee circumstances was intentional and intended to provide some cancelling out of potential biases.

2. How does your survey distinguish between excess deaths due to Pol Pot's policies and the half a million or so people who would have died anyway in Cambodia between 1975 and the start of 1979 (given a 'normal' death rate of 18 per 1000)?

[Dr Heder's reply] Again, if memory serves, I think normal mortality would have to be subtracted from the above figures. I vaguely recall making such calculations in correspondence with Noam Chomsky, but I'm not sure that was shared with Kiernan or anyone else. The interviews did not include a pre-1970 baseline, but did also look at the period 1970-75. Kiernan did not cite the 1970-75 data. If I remember correctly, that material indicated that some of the figures bandied about for the death toll due to US bombing were much exaggerated.

3. Vickery argued that refugee data from the camps you visited could be rather unreliable. You suggested the same thing in 'From Pol Pot To Pen Sovan To The Villages'. How did you get the refugees to give you reliable answers? Given they were displaced and many of their relatives would have been scattered too, how did you make sure they were telling you about people they knew were dead rather than people they assumed were dead? How did you make sure they knew how their relative had died rather than assuming they had died due to the Khmer Rouge? (Vickery presented evidence that many children in the camps assumed their parents had died in the Khmer Rouge period but were later reunited.)

[Dr Heder's reply} There was a separate category for "disappeared," and I they were not assumed dead. For those reported dead, interviewees had to give date and place and specify a cause, which suggests a fair degree of certainty. As for other potential built in statistical biases, one problem is that there was no way my survey could count nuclear families that were totally wiped out, leaving no one to tell the tale, a fact which may have led to an underestimation of the death toll.

4. In 'Kampuchean Occupation And Resistance' you write on page 53 'Since they [the base people] had been eating well, dressing well, and had been politically enfranchised under the Democratic Kampuchea regime, the opening of the rice stocks and evaporation of the Democratic Kampuchea structure did not give them the feelings of raised standard of living, relief and liberation that it gave the new people.' Elsewhere (e.g. page 43) you suggest that while the new people were against both Democratic Kampuchea and the Salvation Front regimes they thought that Democratic Kampuchea had been better in some ways than their situation when you interviewed them. Your evaluation of the views of the base people and new people were based on extensive interviews of refugees. How could it be that such views were being expressed about a regime which it is believed killed so many?

[Dr Heder's reply] My recollection is that the main distinction people made was between the fact that the CPK regime had a ration system, no matter how deeply flawed, whereas they felt the PRK left them entirely to their own devices in a what they considered a desperate situation. They believed that a considerable amount of the slack was taken up by border food distributions (eventually by the land bridge), to which the Vietnamese/PRK were opposed.

Any reply you can give would be gratefully received. Please treat this as an 'open' email. I wish to publish any comments you have to make in my article and pass them onto others who may be interested in them. You are welcome to do the same with my email. Of course, I will not publish your reply to my initial email or forward it, without your express permission.

[Steve Heder's reply] Can I presume you are the same Joseph Ball who has done work on China, including a critique of Dikotter's work on the Great Leap? Can I ask whether you are attempting some kind of comparison of the Cambodia and China cases?

Yours sincerely

Joseph Ball

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